

# AN ESPERANCE BIRD LIST

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## PERIOD OF OBSERVANCE

The notes which follow were compiled between December 21, 1949 and March 5, 1950. For the first six weeks the writers worked together in the field. Thereafter only one observer was present in the field at any one time.

## SCOPE

Most of our notes were made during the course of a number of excursions on foot. The entire shoreline from Cape Le Grand to Eleven Mile Beach, a distance of 36 miles, was traversed, much of it several times. Seven excursions were made to the Bandy Creek area, while Pink Lake, Lake Warden and Lake Wheatfield were each visited at least twice. The intervening sand-hill area was also examined.

## THE TERRAIN

The coast-line consists of a series of sandy bays separated by great granite bluffs. In a few places low cliffs of dune rock rise behind the beaches. There are numerous rocks, reefs and islands off-shore, but these proved inaccessible to us. The principal islands have, however, been described in some detail by Dr. D. L. Serventy ("Notes from the Recherche Archipelago, W.A." *Emu*, vol. 47, p. 44).

There are areas of sand-dune, but generally speaking these are limited and the country which we have described as "sand-hill" comes almost to the beaches. These sand-hills are fairly thickly vegetated, *Acacia* being dominant in most areas. Small *Eucalyptus* and *Banksia* occur in thickets. Especially near the lakes, *Nuytsia* thrives. A species of *Exocarpus* also occurs quite frequently.

Pink Lake, Lake Warden and Lake Wheatfield are part of a lake chain which lies to the north of Esperance. These lakes are drained by Bandy Creek. The lakes were low and Bandy Creek was stagnant at the time of our visit. The whole system, including Bandy Creek, was very saline. Lake Wheatfield and some adjacent pans appeared to contain the freshest water and, perhaps for this reason, supported great numbers of *Coxiella*.

## THE BIRD LIST

**Emu** (*Dromaius novæ-hollandiæ*): Tracks were noted near Lake Wheatfield.

**Little Penguin** (*Eudyptula minor*): A dead bird was found on the beach near the old jetty.

**?Brown Quail** (*?Synoicus australis*): Two quail were flushed from *Juncus* near Lake Wheatfield and flew to some distance.

**Common Bronzewing** (*Phaps chalcoptera*): A few birds apparently of this species were observed in the sand-hills, particularly near Pink Lake.

**Brush Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*):** Several pigeons seen in the sand-hills and at Bandy Creek were identified as this species. This is possibly the more frequent of the two pigeons in this area.

**Coot (*Fulica atra*):** One individual was noted on Bandy Creek on each of two occasions while three birds and later fifteen were seen on Lake Wheatfield.

**Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*):** Four birds were observed at Bandy Creek on one occasion, and one bird on another occasion. Eight grebes, probably of this species, were seen on Lake Wheatfield.

**Fleshy-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*):** Three derelict birds were examined, one on West Beach, one on Newtown Beach and one at Cape Le Grand. Measurements from the first bird were: wing, 12.2 in.; tarsus, 2 in.; middle toe, 2.8 in.; and for the second bird: wing, 12.8 in. approximately; culmen, 1.8 in. approximately. The head of the second bird was sent to Dr. D. L. Serventy for confirmation of identification.

**Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*):** The dried head and neck of a juvenile Wandering Albatross was found on Fourth Beach. The skeleton of a second derelict was found near Cape Le Grand. Remains of the first bird were sent to Dr. Serventy for confirmation of identification.

**Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*):** One seen swimming off-shore between the Railway Jetty and the Newtown Jetty.

**Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*):** A few individuals and small flocks were noted along Bandy Creek. Sometimes they were associated with the more frequent Little Pied Cormorants, e.g., one party of 16 birds included four Little Black Cormorants, while another, the largest flock of cormorants seen, comprised 22 birds, two of which were of this species.

**Black-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*):** Very few cormorants were seen over the ocean, on isolated rocks or on sea beaches. The odd birds or pairs of birds seen (with the exception of the *P. carbo* already recorded) were probably all attributable to this species, though some of those observed, possibly juveniles, did not conform to the typical plumage pattern. Two birds perched on a headland between Second and Third Beaches permitted a close approach and were identified satisfactorily.

On two occasions a solitary individual was seen fishing off the Newtown Beach. Eight dives were timed: 20 seconds, 21 seconds, 23 seconds, 17 seconds, 28 seconds (E.H.S.), 20 seconds, 15 seconds, 18 seconds (L.E.S.). The two last recorded dives appear to have been enforced by breakers.

On one of these occasions the bird was seen to capture and eat three fish, apparently globe-fish (*Spheroides* sp.): Some days later we found a dead globe-fish on the beach proving the species to occur in that locality.

**Little Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*):** Encountered along Bandy Creek and at Lake Wheatfield. See notes on *P. sulcirostris*.

**Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias leucopareia*):** One bird, with dusky underparts, seen over Lake Wheatfield on February 25.

**Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*):** Encountered sparingly along the beaches and near the mouth of Bandy Creek. One was seen flying over Lake Wheatfield. A derelict bird was found on the beach at Newtown.

**Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*):** Encountered infrequently. On January 8, one bird was flushed from the town beach and later the

same day at least two were flying about the end of the jetty where a trawler was berthed. Our only other definite records were of three birds in flight over the old jetty and of single birds off Eleven Mile Beach, Observatory Point, Twilight Cove and Third Beach. One of these was seen in pursuit of a Hooded Dotterel.

**Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis*):** Encountered twice, once over the town beach and once over the mouth of Bandy Creek. In each case there appeared to be two birds.

**Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*):** Silver Gulls were encountered all along the coast, but the highest concentration by far was between Dempster's Head and the Government Jetty where large numbers of birds congregate on the beach and in the town.

The number of birds in juvenile plumage in fourteen flocks, totalling 315 birds, proved to be 45, or 15% nearly.

Observations made during the month of January showed that at about 1915 hours the Silver Gulls began to congregate at three places on the rocks on the north side of Dempster's Head. No birds could be found on the beaches after 1930 hours. At about 1935 hours the flocks would move off in the direction of the Head. We believe that the birds roost off-shore on one of the reefs or islands, but definite evidence is lacking, as it was impossible to trace the course of the flocks beyond the Head so late in the evening.

On February 22, c. 50 birds were noted congregated round a floating object off-shore. The flotsam was later found on the beach surrounded by gulls and proved to be the liver of a large Grey Nurse Shark which had been captured the previous day.

**Pacific Gull (*Gabianus pacificus*):** This species is more evenly distributed along the coast than the foregoing though again the greatest concentration is about the town of Esperance.

All but one of the birds watched appeared to fall into one of four fairly well-defined plumage phases. These were:

First phase: Plumage brown. Legs and bill, greyish.

Second phase: More mottled than first phase. Front, rump and ventral region, whitish. Legs and bill, greyish.

Third phase: Resembles adult, but is readily distinguished by broad black terminal band above and below the tail and the greyish coloration of the underwing.

Adult: As described in most reference books, the black on tail forming a narrow sub-terminal band across the centre of the tail and the underwing white with the tip and outer portion of the trailing edge black.

It should be borne in mind that the foregoing are field descriptions only.

The following is an analysis of 39 birds encountered (I do not think that any individual was counted twice): First phase, 14; second phase, 3; third phase, 4; fourth phase (adult), 18.

Unlike the Silver Gulls, the Pacific Gulls did not flock before going to roost. At 1710 hours a movement from the town beaches towards Dempster's Head would become apparent. This movement reached its height at 1715 hours and except for very occasional laggards, was complete by 1720 hours. The birds followed the shore line, keeping close into the bluff. This movement was of individuals and small parties not exceeding, say, five.

Further observations from posts on Dempster's Head showed that most of the birds continued to hug the shore until in the vicinity of West Beach and then turned seaward. Several parties which we were able to keep in view, proceeded until they reached the vicinity of some rocks off Twilight Cove. Here they descended,



apparently to alight, but as, in the half light, the birds became invisible when they dropped below the sky line, it was impossible to witness the actual arrival. We later found these rocks to be heavily "limed", not a common feature of the rocks in this area. It would appear that most of the Pacific Gulls on this part of the coast roost on these rocks.

Observations of maimed birds suggest that the Gulls return to the same feeding ground each day, e.g., a one-legged bird in the first plumage phase could usually be located just to the south of the Government Jetty.

**Pied Oyster-catcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*):** Four birds were seen on the sandy beach between Bandy Creek and Wylie Bay. On a later occasion three birds were noticed in the same locality. One when flushed flew to a pool at the mouth of Bandy Creek. The birds observed spent most of their time feeding in the wash of the waves, though two were observed sitting down. Our only record west of Esperance was of two birds, loosely associated with three Sooty Oyster-catchers, on Nine Mile Beach.

On a trip to Cape Le Grand by way of the beach, six birds were noted on the outward journey and nine on the return journey. The number of Sooty Oyster-catchers seen on this same trip were six and five respectively, so that, contrary to our experience elsewhere in the district, between Bandy Creek and Cape Le Grand, this proved the more frequent oyster-catcher. All the oyster-catchers seen in this area were on sand.

**Sooty Oyster-catcher (*Haematopus fuliginosus*):** As already indicated, this species proved generally more frequent locally than the foregoing. Individuals were observed almost daily, usually singly or in small parties. The largest number seen at one time was eight feeding in the wash of waves on the rocky headland between Third and Fourth Beaches. Both rocky and sandy beaches were frequented and during the earlier part of our stay, up to four birds could be seen on the town beaches daily. These were very confiding, permitting an approach to within ten yards.

Birds feeding in the wash of waves on sandy beaches were seen to thrust their bills deeply into the sand. Occasionally the head was submerged by an incoming wave. Twice birds were seen to pick up sea weed.

**Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*):** Our only record is of 10 birds flying in close formation over the town. These were last seen moving in the direction of the lakes.

**Large Sand Dotterel (*Charadrius leschenaultii*):** A single bird was seen on three occasions by a pool near the mouth of Bandy Creek, on low dunes between the pool and the beach, and on the beach itself at high water mark.

Identification is based on the pure white under parts, white brow and front, and length, which was estimated to be one and one half times the length of Little Stints and Red-capped Dotterels which were seen with it.

The bird was twice seen to behave aggressively towards Red-capped Dotterels.

**Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*):** A few birds were present at Pink Lake, where two young in the down were seen accompanied by three adults, and a few birds were encountered by Lake Wheatfield. A number of dotterels were to be seen at the mouth of Bandy Creek and on the adjacent sea beach.

This species appeared to be totally absent from the sea beaches adjacent to Esperance, but a few were observed between Bandy Creek and Wylie Bay, and between Eleven Mile Beach and Fourth Beach the species was fairly frequently encountered.

**Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*):** Present in pairs and small flocks at Lake Wheatfield during February and early March.

**Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius cucullatus*):** Two flocks one of about 30 and the other of about 45, were observed on a rock shore by Pink Lake and feeding in the shallows. Their call note was a subdued "ehuek." Seven Hooded Dotterels were observed associated with Red-capped Dotterels and Little Stint on Nine Mile Beach. One (? immature) lacking the dark hood, was seen at Twilight Cove and one was noted at a pool near the mouth of Bandy Creek. Three fairly large flocks were encountered to the east of Wylie Bay and two birds shot at Lake Mullet were examined.

**Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*):** On December 23, between 40 and 50 individuals were seen on the beach to the east of the Government Jetty. These birds avoided the wash of the waves.

Mr. McKenzie of Esperance reported the presence of large numbers of these birds between the town and Dempster's Head just prior to our arrival in Esperance. Some of these birds were seen to alight in the sea some distance from the shore. Mr. C. F. Fraser also referred to this irruption.

**Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*):** One seen on rocks at Observatory Cove. One doubtfully identified at Lake Wheatfield.

**Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*):** One bird was seen at Bandy Creek on February 8. A few birds could usually be seen at Lake Wheatfield, where, on February 25, ten were noted loosely associated.

**Little Stint (*Erolia ruficollis*):** Little Stint were noted in all localities frequented by the Red-capped Dotterel, the greatest concentration being near the mouth of Bandy Creek. The number of stint was usually in excess of the number of dotterel, and, as is usually the case, the stint were less inclined to wander from the water's edge.

**Sharp-tailed Stint (*Erolia acuminata*):** Fairly frequent at Lake Wheatfield, flocks of up to one hundred being noted.

**White-fronted Heron (*Notophox novae-hollandiae*):** No heron were encountered until January 28 when first one and then two birds were seen by Bandy Creek. Later the same day at least 17 birds were observed at Lake Wheatfield where similar numbers were encountered on later occasions.

**Reef Heron (*Demigretta sacra*):** One was seen on a reef off Nine Mile Beach. Flushed, this bird flew to the rocks at Observatory Cove and later to Observatory Island.

**Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*):** None was seen until February 10 when four were observed on Lake Wheatfield. On three subsequent visits, the numbers present were nineteen, one, and four, respectively.

**Mountain Duck (*Tadorna tadornoides*):** Pairs of from two to fifteen were observed over Esperance Bay, at the mouth of Bandy Creek, and over Pink Lake.

**Black Duck (*Anas pockilorhyncha*):** Two were seen flying over Esperance Bay and later resting on the beach near Bandy Creek. Individuals and small parties were encountered on Bandy Creek, the largest flock comprising eleven birds. Wings removed from birds which had been shot, measured 9.6 inches and 10.5 inches.

**Chestnut Teal (*Anas castanea*):** Identified from a fully-plumaged male in a sportsman's "bag." Pairs of teal were encountered on Bandy Creek and a flock of about 20 birds on Lake Wheat-



field. Some of these were probably Chestnut Teal, but some were almost certainly Grey Teal. Absence of birds in the male-type plumage of the Chestnut Teal appears significant.

Measurements were made of a few wings taken from birds which had been shot. Lengths of wings were: 7.8, 8.0, 7.6, 7.4 and 7.3 inches.

**Grey Teal** (*Anas gibberifrons*): See above.

**Musk Duck** (*Biziura lobata*): One drake was seen on Bandy Creek. On another occasion a probable duck was seen in the same locality. Finally, on a third occasion, two birds were seen.

**Swamp Harrier** (*Circus approximans*): Two birds were seen flying along West Beach. On reaching the rocky headland at the eastern end of the beach, the birds stayed circling, one sometimes stooping at the other in an apparently playful manner.

**Wedge-tailed Eagle** (*Uroaetus audax*): Three birds were observed soaring over Second Beach and two birds were seen over Mt. Le Grand.

**Brown Hawk** (*Falco berigora*): Encountered sparingly among the sandhills. One bird, carrying what appeared to be a snake, was harried by two Kestrels until it dropped its prey. One of the Kestrels stooped, apparently with the idea of securing the object.

**Nankeen Kestrel** (*Falco cenchroides*): This was the most frequent and evenly distributed of the birds of prey. Probable nesting sites were noted in the granite rocks at the end of West Beach.

**Purple-crowned Lorikeet** (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*): Small flocks were observed fairly frequently in flight or in patches of flowering eucalypts among the sandhills. Lorikeets in a deep gully to the north of Dempster's Head moved about the stunted eucalypts without undue alarm, enabling us to see them plainly and to appreciate the full beauty of their plumage.

**White-tailed Black Cockatoo** (*Calyptorhynchus baudinii*): A flock of about 30 birds was seen in flight near Esperance and birds were heard calling and seen feeding in banksias near Lake Wheatfield.

**Rock Parrot** (*Nymphes petrophila*): We did not find individuals of this species plentiful. One bird was observed in the sandhills near Esperance, and four were seen in flight over the town. At Wylie Bay, we watched at least 12 birds feeding among the sandhills. The birds were seen among *Spinifex* and *Juncus* and were observed feeding on the succulent fruits of a small dune plant. Others were heard at the western end of Eleven Mile Beach and two were seen perched on a dead bush at the foot of the cliffs. Our final record was of two birds seen over dune rock cliffs at Fourth Beach. The call note was a subdued "titter, titter, titter."

**Sacred Kingfisher** (*Halcyon sanctus*): One observed perched on a branch overhanging Bandy Creek.

**Welcome Swallow** (*Hirundo neoxena*): Frequent and widely distributed. A disused nest was found located in a small cave on a granite headland at Third Beach.

**Tree Martin** (*Hylochelidon nigricans*): Four were noted over the Fresh Air League Camp on February 17 and several over the golf links on February 28. These were the only Martins observed.

**Black-and-White Fantail** (*Rhipidura leucophrys*): Only one pair of wagtails was located in Esperance and the species appears to be almost entirely absent from the surrounding country, excepting the Bandy Creek area, where several pairs were located, and in the vicinity of Lake Wheatfield where, on one occasion, no less than six were counted on mud flats surrounding a small pool. Others were in the vicinity.

**Restless Flycatcher** (*Seisura inquieta*): The frog-like single note of this species was heard among paperbarks at the edge of a pool at Bandy Creek and two birds were located without difficulty. The birds were not seen on later visits, but one was observed in paperbarks by Lake Wheatfield.

**Western Shrike-Thrush** (*Colluricincla rufiventris*): One bird noted in a thicket by Bandy Creek.

**Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** (*Coracina novaehollandiae*): Single birds were seen about Esperance; one could usually be located in the railway yards. A number were seen by Bandy Creek and on two occasions flocks were observed, one of 13 and one of 12 birds. This summer flocking of Cuckoo-Shrikes in coastal localities appears to call for further investigation.

**White-fronted Chat** (*Epthianura albifrons*): A small flock was observed on several occasions near the mouth of Bandy Creek. The most birds seen on any one occasion was six.

**Brown Thornbill** (*Acanthiza pusilla*): Widely distributed in the sandhill areas.

**Chestnut-tailed Thornbill** (*Acanthiza uropygialis*): A few were seen associated with the Yellow-tailed Thornbills mentioned below.

**Yellow-tailed Thornbill** (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*): A flock of from 20 to 25 was noted forming the core of a mixed association near Lake Wheatfield. This was our only record of the species.

**Spotted Scrub-Wren** (*Sericornis maculatus*): A flock may be located in almost any dense thicket among the sandhills.

**Striated Field-Wren** (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*): Frequent in the vicinity of Dempster's Head and along the coast towards Second Beach. One evening at Dempster's Head, at 1920 hours, we heard an animated evening chorus from small birds in low heath. This calling was almost certainly assignable to this species.

**Splendid Wren** (*Malurus splendens*): A flock was located by Lake Wheatfield. No fully-plumaged cock was seen, but a cock bird with blue ear coverts and blue on the wings was noted.

**Dusky Wood-Swallow** (*Artamus cyanopterus*): A flock of six was observed over dense *Acacia* scrub by Bandy Creek. These were the only wood-swallows seen, with the exception of a single bird, probably of this species, seen at Lake Wheatfield.

**Silver-eye** (*Zosterops australasiae*): This is possibly the most abundant species in the district and one which may be encountered in numbers throughout the sandhill area. During January the birds were dominant in the dawn chorus, their song being strongest at about 0420 hours.

Two nests each with three eggs were found late in December. In each case two eggs only hatched and in each case the young birds disappeared before they were due to leave the nest.

The first nest was situated five feet from the ground in an *Acacia*. This species of *Acacia* is subject to a malformation, caused, perhaps, by galls or borers, which takes the form of a dense bunch of phyllodes. A horizontal fork in such a malformation, dead, provided a site for the well-hidden nest.

An unusual feature of the nest was an annexe comprising a sort of half-cup attached to the nest proper.

The second nest was built 33 inches from the ground in a leguminous shrub. Ten feet away was an old nest built 30 inches from the ground in a dead shrub sheltered by a creeper.

DIMENSIONS OF NESTS:

	First Nest (without annexe)	Second Nest
Outside diameter	2.4 in.	2.5 in.
Inside diameter	1.5 ..	1.75 ..
Inside depth	1.5 ..	1.5 ..
Outside depth	2.0 ..	2.0 ..

ANALYSIS OF NEST MATERIAL:

Material	First Nest			Second Nest		
	No. of pieces	Average length	Max. length	No. of pieces	Average length	Max. length
Grass stems	11	(in.) 6.2	(in.) 26.3	25	(in.) 3.7	(in.) 5.7
Other stems	85	4.0	8.0			
Hairs	4	6.6	8.8	20	10.3	29.4
Roots	31	2.9	6.2	20	Not measured	
Dead leaves	15					
Clematis seed hairs	390			74		
Vegetable fragments	475	Under two inches				
Canary grass heads				33	Not counted	
Pieces of wool (green)				1		

**Spinebill** (*Acanthorhynchus superciliosus*): Two noted near Lake Wheatfield.

**White-fronted Honeyeater** (*Gliciphila albifrons*): Apparently present near Lake Wheatfield, but satisfactory views were not obtained.

**Brown Honeyeater** (*Gliciphila indistincta*): Noted among flowering *Banksia* and *Eucalyptus* along the shores of Pink Lake.

**Singing Honeyeater** (*Meliphaga virescens*): Fairly widely though unevenly distributed throughout the sandhill area.

**New Holland Honeyeater** (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*): Numerous in thickets of flowering *Eucalyptus*, *Nuytsia* and *Banksia* on Dempster's Head. Noted in association with similar vegetation at Lake Warden.

**Red Wattle-bird** (*Anthochaera carunculata*): One or two birds were heard calling at the southern end of Esperance and a few were observed among flowering trees near Pink Lake.

**Little Wattle-bird** (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*): Observed among flowering *Banksia* near Lake Warden and Pink Lake.

**Australian Pipit** (*Anthus novæ-seelandiæ*): Individuals encountered very sparingly above high tide mark on beaches and in adjacent dunes and sandhills with sparse vegetation.

**Raven** (*Corvus coronoideus*): Remains of a dead bird were identified by Dr. D. L. Serventy as this species. The discovery of this bird proved a mild surprise to E.H.S. who had leaned to the opinion that birds seen in the field were *C. bennetti*.

Flocks of up to 15 birds were seen.

**Grey Butcher-bird** (*Cracticus torquatus*): Widely distributed and fairly numerous throughout the sand-hill region, occasionally appearing on the granite bluffs along the coast.

**Western Magpie** (*Gymnorhina dorsalis*): Flocks encountered were all small; usually only one or two birds were seen at a time. Only two flocks were noted in the town itself. Others were observed among the sand-hills, usually near farm houses and at Six Mile Hill. One bird was seen on the beach near the Fresh Air League Camp.